



John Richards Initiative

Research into aged care in rural communities



**Research into aged care in
rural communities:
What do we know and what do
we need to know?**

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Vision for the initiative

The development and implementation of
a program of research that makes a
difference to the lives of a diverse range
of older people living in rural communities



Six principles

1. The provision of good research evidence
2. That makes a difference to the lives of older people
3. Involving an inclusive research process that doesn't assume all older people are the same.
4. That explores and supports older people's capacity to age well
5. That recognises the community dimension
6. That, where appropriate, is undertaken in partnership with others



What do we know: research on ageing

- Move from sole focus on ageing as “a sickness” to recognise the breadth of ageing issues
- The diversity of these issues
- The social dimension impacts on health outcomes
- The health and well-being of older people can be profoundly influenced by their geographical location



What do we know: research on ageing in rural areas

- Rural Australia is growing old fast
- In rural / regional Victoria, much faster proportionately than metro Melbourne
- Includes ageing-in-place and tree changers – involves tradeoffs



What do we know: research on ageing in rural areas (2)

- Older people not the same, just as rural communities are not the same
- We know that there are both advantages / disadvantages associated with rural ageing...



... and what don't we know

- Little research directed at maintaining / promoting health in rural areas
- Little research on models of service delivery in rural areas aimed at maximising independence and promoting healthy ageing
- Little research designed to aid planning for the future
- Particularly perhaps in relation to the needs of babyboomers (Davis & Bartlett 2008)



In this context, what are the disadvantages associated with rural health and ageing (1)

- Health inequalities
- Exacerbated by socioeconomic disadvantage eg drought, economy (Smith et al., 2008)
- Difficulties of access to health / aged care services
- Particularly to specialist services and for certain groups (eg CALD groups)
- Older people at risk of social and geographical isolation (transport etc)



The disadvantages associated with rural health and ageing (2)

- Difficulty in recruitment and retention of health / aged care workforce in rural areas (Hogan Report 2004; AIHW 2005)
- Including ageing of current workforce
Competing for increasingly scarce resources
- Need to look at alternative models
- And what makes collaborations work (Robinson 1999)(ARC Linkage project)



...but there are positives too (1)

- High level of individual and community resilience
- Quality of life issues
- High levels of social cohesion, bonding social capital, social connectedness
- Smaller, more stable communities



...but there are positives too (2)

- Significant innovation in a tough environment (Wakerman 2008) – eg workers wear many hats, the MPS
- Incubator for developing new models of care (Productivity Commission: review of health care workforce 2006)
- Different workforce models
- Including technological solutions



So what is it we need to know...

- Both positives / negatives associated with rural ageing:
- Negatives – health inequalities amongst rural population; crisis in rural workforce
- Positives – resilience & social strengths; innovation in workforce models
- *How do these interact in the lives of older people in rural communities?*
- Eg difficulties in delivery of health and aged care services but good community support / informal care
- ► broad program of research



Research program: Healthy ageing in small rural communities

- What does ageing well mean for older people in small, rural communities?
- Issues of local governance
- Social inclusion and ageing – policy / practice
- Advance care planning (Annette Street's Supportive and Palliative Care group)
- How best to assess community needs
- Issues of diversity / disadvantage eg
Indigenous ageing, those with mental illness



Research program: Workforce planning / innovation in rural areas

- Innovation in the delivery of services in border regions of N-E Victoria
- Encouraging students in health sciences to study aged care
- Education / practice of cancer care nurses (Annette Street's group)
- Professionals as volunteers in rural areas (ARC Linkage application, JW + QUT)



An invitation

Interested in further information?

Then please contact us:

www.latrobe.edu.au/jri

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